

VZCZCXRO0430
PP RUEHAG RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHUP #0613/01 2371141
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 251141Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4431
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHSL/AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA 0004
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUDAPEST 000613

SIPDIS

EUR/CE FOR JAMIE MOORE. PLEASE PASS TO NSC JEFF HOVENIER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/24/2014
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LO](#) [HU](#)
SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA AND HUNGARY: NO LOVE LOST

REF: BRATISLAVA 370

BUDAPEST 00000613 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: CDA Jeff Levine, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (U) Summary. In the wake of President Solyom's aborted trip to Slovakia, the GOH is attempting to balance national outrage with an obvious need to improve bilateral relations with its northern neighbor. A meeting between the Foreign Ministers is scheduled for this weekend and may reduce tensions, but Hungary is also considering various opportunities to "internationalize" the incident. In a meeting yesterday between Foreign Minister Balazs and Slovak Ambassador Peter Weiss, both sides held ground regarding the others unacceptable behavior, but Weiss called the overall meeting "constructive." With massively unfavorable press coverage of Slovakia and the government under heavy pressure to react, a concerted effort from both sides will be necessary to move past this latest irritant. End summary

The Facts (As Presented in Hungary)

12. (C) In his August 20 National Day Speech, President Solyom strongly advocated for minority rights, spoke out against Slovakia's language law, and stressed that regardless of borders and citizenship, Hungarian people are connected by their culture, wherever they may reside. As part of his national day activities, Solyom was invited to the unveiling of a statue of Hungary's first king, Saint Stephen, in Komarno, Slovakia (Revkomarom in Hungarian). From the Hungarian perspective, a legitimate undertaking in support of Komarno's ethnic Hungarian community. While the level of notification the Slovak's received and what approvals were given is still being debated here - Weiss told us the Slovak government had been "signaling" for the past week that Solyom's presence would be inappropriate for reasons listed in reftel. Hungarian MFA Senior State Secretary Vilmos Szabo confirmed with PolOff that both Foreign Minister Balazs and Prime Minister Bajnai advised President Solyom not to go as "it was the wrong date" for a visit., even in a private capacity. According to Szabo, initially Solyom decided not to attend, but two weeks ago changed his mind and decided to attend as a "private citizen." At that point, Szabo said the MFA made all the necessary diplomatic notifications, coordinate with the Slovak MFA, which according to Szabo was "fair and patient," but there was never an indication during those discussions that the visit should not occur.

Reactions

13. (C) As the Slovak's became more vocal in their demands

that Solyom not come, the President ultimately decided to cancel the visit, and instead hold a press conference in the middle of the bridge marking the border. Solyom called the Slovak move "inexplicable and inexcusable." Hungary's conservative opposition parties FIDESZ and KDNP have condemned Slovakia and Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Nemeth (FIDESZ) has called for parliamentary hearings. State Secretary Szabo labeled the Slovak decision "an insult to the President and the Hungarian people." The press has been universal and strident in its condemnation of Slovakia and David Koranyi, the Prime Minister's National Security advisor acknowledged "there is an outrage in the society that can't be ignored." At the same time, however, Koranyi stressed "we must work hard to defuse this tension." He characterized Slovakia's internal situation as "fragile" and facing the same economic problems that Hungary faced a year ago. These problems, Koranyi said, "can be hidden by playing the Hungarian card. Elections are coming and we're afraid this is early posturing."

On the Horizon

14. (C) According to our Hungarian contacts and Ambassador Weiss, both sides are interested in reducing tensions. In his talks with the Foreign Minister, Weiss urged him not to take this incident to international bodies. The Hungarians are undecided, but may well do that in the face of public pressure. The Government is also considering a briefing in Budapest on its version of the story. On a more positive note, the two foreign ministers are scheduled to meet this Sunday at the Bled Strategic Forum in Slovenia. Koranyi also said a meeting between the Prime Ministers could be a possibility within the next few weeks. Finally, Weiss said

BUDAPEST 00000613 002.2 OF 002

the Slovak's are working on a program in Hungary to again attempt to explain the controversial language law, specifically trying to correct the misinformation regarding possible fines of Hungarian speakers for using their language. Despite the current outrage regarding Solyom's trip, Koranyi said the language law remains by far the more sensitive issue.

Further Background

15. (C) Last week's incident was not the first time Solyom encountered difficulties when attempting to visit a neighboring country. In March 2009, the Hungarian President was to attend ceremonies in Transylvania, when the Romanian authorities denied Solyom's military flight landing permission; Solyom chose to go anyway and made the trip by automobile. Solyom was also unwelcome in Serbia on the same holiday, where his "private visit" drew criticism from PM Tadic. (Comment. State Secretary Szabo also referred to the Romanian "incident," telling the PolOff that while the Romanian government refused the request for Solyom to travel officially by aircraft, they allowed him to visit as a "private citizen, commenting that the "Romanians were professional while the Slovaks were not." End comment.)

16. (C) Comment. The Prime Minister's desire to reduce tension is laudable, but may be difficult in such a hostile political and media environment. In addition, the historic baggage of this tense bilateral relationship weighs deeply on every issue. Post continues to urge a unified message from Embassy Budapest, Embassy Bratislava and Washington stressing communication, cooperation and constructive behavior from both sides. With both countries facing elections in the next year, more nationalist positions are likely to obscure more pressing problems, draw voters and could led to more extremist governments.

